Navigating the Genres of Empire: Successes, Failures, and Attempts at Social Action in Clarke’s

*His Natural Life*

Abstract

In *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, genre scholars Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff summarize the distinction between genre in literary studies and genre in composition studies by saying that literature courses most often “emphasize the role of the reader,” while composition emphasizes “the role of the writer” (28). Nevertheless, Bawarshi and Reiff, as well as other scholars such as Miller and Devitt, point out the usefulness of uniting and overlaying these varied understandings of genre. In this article, I extend this call for uniting composition and literary conceptions of genre by considering the rhetorical, social action-based genres at play within Marcus Clarke’s 1874 Australian convict transportation novel, *His Natural Life*. Using rhetorical genre theory, I argue that convicts and other characters are able to successfully utilize public genres only when they uphold the ideologies of Empire; when convicts or others attempt to use genres to subvert Empire, their attempts result in failure. Further, close reading demonstrates that other genres not employed by dominant characters likewise work in a system of upholding the imperial agenda, reinforcing the efforts of those who act according the its ideologies and thwarting characters who attempt to subvert them. Thus, genres within *His Natural Life* are capable of being studied both in terms of writer characters who uptake and utilize them, as well as reader characters—and real-world readers—who respond to them.
JUDGE This is not the place for an accusation against Captain Frere, nor the place to argue upon your alleged wrongs. If you have suffered injustice, the authorities will hear your complaint, and redress it.

RUFUS DAWES I have complained, your Honour. I wrote letter after letter to the Government, but they were never sent. Then I heard she was dead, and they sent me to the Coal Mines after that, and we never hear anything there. (Clarke 187)

Marcus Clarke’s 1874 novel, *For the Term of* His Natural Life, as well as its serially-printed predecessor, demonstrate strong opposition to the British Empire’s system of transporting British criminals to the continent of Australia, Tasmania, and the surrounding islands, a practice that had largely ended by the time the novel was published. Written with the benefit of hindsight, *His Natural Life* portrays the inhumaness of the convict transportation system. Throughout the novel, the geography of Tasmania and Australia are described as well-suited locations for such practices, with the land having “advantages of nature and art” that allow the “prison [to be] held the most secure in the world” (Clark 256). In a dinner gathering midway through the novel, characters discuss the island’s terrain in passing. Mr. Pounce, for instance, notes: “This island seems specially adapted by Providence for a convict settlement; for with an admirable climate, it carries little indigenous vegetation which will support human life” (Clark 203-4). Other characters likewise agree, with Mrs. Protherick noting that the “country is so delightfully barren” and Frere happily confirming that “there isn’t a scrap for human beings to make a meal on” (Clark 204). Descriptions such as these add to an image of the island as the ideal prison, perfect for holding convicts and making escape both difficult and dangerous. Further, the fact that higher-class, non-convict character can describe such geographic features as part of a nonchalant, polite dinner conversation adds to the novel’s condemnation of convict transportation by
emphasizing the characters’ views of convicts as animals, as less-than-human, as unruly property that would starve if they strayed too far from the settlements.

While remarks on the terrain’s usefulness for keeping prisoners in their place and continuing the business of Empire seem fairly obvious, I offer up a less obvious tool of Empire for consideration: Genres of writing. According to regulations, convicts are not allowed to write without permission (Clark 204). But beyond simply being prohibited from producing writing, similarly to the geography of the land itself, the genres which contain writing function in the novel to maintain the convict transportation system, particularly for convicts found guilty of secondary crimes, which is the majority of those depicted in the novel. My analysis defines genres in the manner of contemporary genre scholar Carolyn Miller, who argues that genres are “typified responses” to “recurrent rhetoric situations” (Miller 151). Thus, more than simply “categories of texts,” genres are instead social actions backed by ideologies. Though the novel contains a large number of examples of written genres, I focus solely on those that I term “public genres,” those intended to be read by audiences other than the self. Using rhetorical genre theory, I argue that convicts and other characters are able to successfully utilize public genres only when they uphold the ideologies of Empire; when convicts or others attempt to use genres to subvert Empire, their attempts result in failure.

This analysis examines five major characters from the novel and their interactions with public genres: The conniving convict John Rex, the condemned, yet innocent Rufus Dawes, the morally-conflicted Reverend James North, malicious and deceptive Captain Marcus Frere, and

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1 In addition to instances in the novel itself, the prison-like quality of the island is likewise discussed by Therese-Marie Meyer in “Prison Without Walls: The Tasmanian bush in Australian Convict Novels” described below.

2 The novel contains a variety of private, or at least non-public, genres that, for the sake of space, this analysis will not take up, such as Sylvia’s reading of books.
infatuated, yet powerful Sarah Purfoy. This analysis is divided into two parts. The first considers characters who are convicts, while the second examines non-convict characters. Though I break up discussion in this way, this is not to assume that one group is more successful than another in using genres. In each category, I analyze example situations in which characters consciously employ or uptake public genres for particular purposes, and I conclude by briefly considering other genres that act on these characters and the genres they produce. Before proceeding to this analysis, however, I preface my work by first summarizing previous scholarship on *His Natural Life*, as well as providing a more detailed justification for my use of rhetorical genre studies as a theoretical lens.

**Previous Scholarship on *His Natural Life***

In order to have a more distinct sense of what a rhetorical genre studies analysis adds to an understanding of *His Natural Life*, I begin by summarizing prominent scholarship on the text, focusing primarily on works which analyze the novel form, which is my own choice for textual analysis, not the previously-published, much lengthier serial version.

*His Natural Life* is discussed in a variety of ways and in a variety of depth. Some works, for instance, only mention the novel in passing, such as within Dorice Williams Elliott’s “Convict Servants and Middle-Class Mistresses,” providing a basis for comparison with woman-authored texts such as Caroline Leakey’s *The Broad Arrow* (“Convict Servants” 175) and Eliza Winstanley’s *For Her Natural Life* (“Convict Servants” 181). On the other hand, many articles and book chapters focus extensively on the novel because of Clarke’s use of historical information to write the novel and its serially-published predecessor. Within their chapter titled “Crimes and Punishments,” part of Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra’s *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, the authors heavily situate the novel within the
history and context of the convict transportation system. Hodge and Mishra also consider Marcus Clarke’s position in going to Australia, a role the authors describe as ambiguous, aiding his task of reforming the system (Hodge and Mishra 125). Similarly, consider L. L. Robson’s “The Historical Basis of For the Term of His Natural Life.” As its title suggest, the article explores the factual basis behind the novel, which is particularly important given that the “novel is responsible for some popular opinions concerning the transportation of prisoners to Australia” (Robson 104). Robson concludes by affirming that Clarke’s “use of historical material made the novel a more effective human document than it otherwise might have been” (Robson 119).

In addition to a focus on historical accuracy, some scholarship on His Natural Life examines the novel’s Australian/Tasmanian setting. In “Marcus Clarke- His Natural Life,” like my own analysis, Michael Wilding begins by pointing out the ways in which Clarke’s descriptions of the terrain of Tasmania emphasize its inhumanity. Wilding notes that “Clarke was not simply offering a naturalistic account of a particular situation at a particular historical time and in a particular geographical context” (Wilding 19). Instead, Clarke “was also presenting a vision of human life,” a general argument to which Wilding devotes the remainder of his article. Taking a different approach, Therese-Marie Meyer writes in “Prison without Walls: Tasmanian Bush in Australian Convict Novels” that Clarke’s representation of “Tasmanian bush” is “hermaphroditic” in nature, or demonstrating “feminine as well as masculine features” (Meyer 144).

Though not focused on the geographic or topographic features of the novel’s setting, Damien Barlow’s “Sexual Unspeakability” likewise takes up the issue of sexuality. Barlow begins by examining the “perverse sexual reputation” of the novel in the minds of critics at the time, who cite instances such as the gang rape and flogging of Kirkland (Barlow 34). Barlow
then proceeds to offer a queer close reading that argues the novel operates in a framework of William A. Cohen’s “sexual unspeakability” (Barlow 35), providing silences that represent “non-normative sexual desires” (Barlow 34), allowing the book to push back against “the heterosexual conventions of the Victorian romance novel” (Barlow 46).

As a final example of the type of recent scholarship published on His Natural Life, consider Birns’s “Globalization Down Under.” Birns’s chief goal is to “recommend Clarke’s novel as a teaching text” to a “North American academic audience” (Birns 127). To demonstrate its usefulness as a teaching text, Birns considers how the novel can align with “three motifs of recent theoretical argument,” including Bentham’s Panopticon, “postcolonial mimicry” within “settler colonies”, and, finally, the function of the “marriage-plot” within Victorian story-telling (Birns 128). Of the scholarship reviewed above, Birns’ article comes the closest to a consideration of genre, particularly in its third theoretical argument, which takes up the issue of conventions within Victorian novels. In other words, Birns considers the function of specific features of this literary genre and the particular ways that His Natural Life embodies or subverts these features.

However, even given Birns’ focus on genre features within the third component of his argument for using His Natural Life as a pedagogical tool, this analysis is not extensive. Further, neither Birns nor other critics have yet utilized the concept of genres as rhetorical and based in action. Current scholarship on the novel has overlooked the importance of how the work’s characters take up genres for their intended purposes; likewise, scholarship has yet to consider what the results of these characters’ genre usage suggests about the goals of empire in the novel. Next, I turn to a closer consideration of the concept of genre, both how it is typically employed
within literary studies, as well as within other fields, thus establishing a theoretical framework for my own analysis of *His Natural Life*.

**Genre and the Study of Texts—Literary and Non**

In their chapter titled “Genre in Literary Traditions” within *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, genre scholars Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff describe the variety of genre conceptions that exist within literary studies alone. These approaches include Neoclassical, Structuralist, Romantic and Post-Romantic, Reader Response, and Cultural Studies. Clearly, even within one particular field, studying genre can entail a variety of considerations. Even so, and Bawarshi and Reiff’s concluding thought to this chapter helpfully summarizes the distinction between genre in literary studies and genre in composition studies by saying that literature courses most often “emphasize the role of the reader,” while composition emphasizes “the role of the writer” (Bawarshi and Reiff 28). That is, in general, examining genre within literary traditions means that readers of texts are the ones who assign genre labels. Readers are also the ones who assess the features that unite particular genres; rarely does the writer of a text consciously decide to write within a particular genre. Instead, genres are classified and studied by outsiders after having being written by an author. In rhetoric and composition, by contrast, genres are categories of texts which writers most often consciously decide to compose in. To write well is to have a clear understanding of a particular genre’s features, impact on audiences, and so on, and to make strategic, genre knowledge-based decisions (or even break conventions) to most effectively convey information or accomplish a particular rhetorical purpose.

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3 Bawarshi and Reiff’s entire book likewise takes up an examination of genre with the following additional fields: systemic functional and corpus linguistics, English for specific purposes, sociology, academic contexts, workplace and professional contexts, public and new media contexts, and pedagogy.
Nevertheless, despite these apparent differences between conceptions in genre within literary studies and rhetoric and composition, Bawarshi and Reiff, as well as other scholars, point out the usefulness of uniting and overlaying these varied understandings of genre. In “Integrating Rhetorical and Literary Theories of Genre,” which was published in College English in 2000, Amy J. Devitt takes up this very issue of the seeming disparity of genre understanding between sub-fields of English. Devitt begins by positing that, if “subdisciplines” of English “share more in common with one another than they do with other disciplines, then a greater argument can be made that we in English should work to maintain our connections, for our different methodologies and questions can complements and contribute to one another’s research and teaching” (Devitt 696). Devitt then devotes the remainder of her article to exploring one component of our field’s “shared study of discourse,” which is the idea of genre (Devitt 696-7). By way of conclusion, Devitt first summarizes these differing understandings of genre:

Literature course may always reemphasize the role of the reader, the writer’s uniqueness, the text’s significant variations from expectations, even literature’s transcendence beyond and yet situatedness in local circumstances. Composition course may always emphasize the role of the writer, the reader as common audience, the text’s conformity to expectations, and even the significance of the writer’s process. (Devitt 715)

After pointing out the drastic difference, however, Devitt ends by pointing out the shared characteristics of each discipline’s genre conceptions, for

[B]oth can be understood as only part of the picture of reading and writing. Both sets of emphases can be encompassed with a genre theory that sees genres as involving readers, writers, text, and contexts; that sees all writers and readers as both unique and as necessarily casting themselves into common, social roles; that sees genres as requiring
both conformity with and variation from expectations; that sees genres as always unstable, always multiple, always emerging. (Devitt 715)

Thus, Devitt points out that composition and literature ultimately conceive of genre in similar fashions, despite their clear distinctions. For Devitt, the field of English’s task is to “remain fluid enough to encompass the multiplicity and instability of its participants,” in literature and composition alike (Devitt 715).

Drawing on the work of Bawarshi and Reiff and others, as well as taking up Devitt’s call to embrace genre’s usefulness in literature and in rhetoric and composition, in what follows, I utilize a particular theory of genre, one tied most often to the rhetorical side of English departments: Rhetorical genre studies. However, I apply the theory to a literary text, Clarke’s *His Natural Life*, considering the ways that characters within the novel take up public genres to attempt to enact change, for good or for malicious purposes. Miller’s seminal essay, “Genre as Social Action,” cited in the introduction above first introduced the concept of genres as actions based in recurring, rhetoric situations. Miller stresses the practicality and real-world application of studying genres. Her article ends as follows: “The perspective on genres proposed here has implications not only for criticism and theory, but also for rhetorical education… For the critic, genres can serve both as an index to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular speakers and writers; for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community” (Miller 165). Thus, Miller confirms that the concept of rhetorical genres is useful within both criticism and theory and within studies of rhetoric, and it is rhetorical genre studies in particular that I employ to consider genres within *His Natural Life*.

Key to both an understanding of rhetorical genre studies and my analysis is an understanding of the concept of uptake. In “Genres as Forms of In(ter)vention,” Anis Bawarshi
speaks extensively about uptake, which “can be understood as the ideological interstices that configure, normalize, and activate relations and meanings within and between systems of genres” (Bawarshi 80). Uptakes, then, are backed by ideological systems of power, making some actions normal and some outlying. Further, Ann Freadman argues in “Uptake” the uptakes are “bidirectional” exchanges heavily based on memory—memory of how the exchange has worked in the past, how the sequence of events typically occurs, etc. Bawarshi stresses the importance of uptake, its ideologies, and its memories because “Knowledge of uptake is knowledge of what to take up, how, and when: when and why to use a genre, how to select an appropriate genre in relation to another, how to execute uptakes strategically and when to resist […]” (Freadman 81).

When discussing characters’ uptakes of public genres within *His Natural Life*, I consider that characters make their composing decisions based on memory, considering what genres to uptake, how these genres have worked in the past, and what ideologies a particular genre needs to reinforce in order to be acceptable.

My analysis below argues that the success of public genes is dependent on the extent to which they uphold the ideologies of Empire; when convicts or others uptake genres and attempt to use them to subvert Empire, their attempts result in failure. Further, close reading demonstrates that other genres not employed by dominant characters likewise work in a system of upholding the imperial agenda, reinforcing the efforts of those who act according the its ideologies and thwarting characters who attempt to subvert them. Thus, genres within *His Natural Life* are capable of being studied both in terms of writer characters who uptake and utilize them, as well as reader characters—and real-world readers—who respond to and read them.

**Convict Characters**
To begin, I consider the writings and associated genres produced by the two most prominently-discussed convicts within the novel, John Rex and Rufus Dawes. The notion of convicts being producers of texts is an interesting one, particularly given the historical realities of the convict system in Australia. In *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia’s Founding*, Robert Hughes writes that, in Port Macquarie in particular, a convict “could get 100 lashes for trying to smuggle a letter out, or a month in the cell for merely possessing a piece of writing paper” (Hughes 438). Hughes’s work makes it clear that writing was a dangerous act for a convict to undertake. In the chapter titled “Writing Convicts” of her forthcoming book, *Transported to Botany Bay: Class, Nation, and the Figure of the Australian Convict*, Dorice Williams Elliott likewise confirms the rarity of writing while imprisoned by extensively studying the three “full-length works of literature by actual convicts” (“Writing Convicts” 1). These real-world writers include James Hardy Vaux, who “was the first person in Australia to write a full-length autobiography”, Henry Savery, and James Tucker, the latter two of which “wrote autobiographical novels while still under sentence” (“Writing Convicts” 1). As Elliott points out, these three convicts were likely only able to do so because of their high status as “gentlemen-convicts” who had the ability and the understandings of the autobiography genre to be able to reproduce it (“Writing Convicts” 1). Further, these convict writers were forbidden to engage in writing beyond that of letters or as part of their sentenced-duties, and to write literature was likely a tremendous risk. Indeed, even within the fictionalized narrative of *His Natural Life*, characters acknowledge that prisoners are not permitted to write, at least not without expressed permission to do so. Major Vickers, who has a penchant for referring to the Queen’s Regulations, makes this very objection: “A letter! […] You know that by the King’s—no, the Queen’s Regulations, no letters are allowed to be sent to the friends of prisoners without first passing
through the hands of the authorities” (Clark 204). Given the risk of writing in this historical and social context, it is all the more interesting that convicts within *His Natural Life* attempted to engage in writing, though some more successfully than others.

More than any other convict, John Rex is able to successfully utilize public genres to accomplish his own criminal purposes. However, the reason he is able to do so is because of his awareness of how the genres are intended to function within the Empire. In other words, Rex is able to manipulate both genres and the audiences who read them by playing into their conceptions of what it means to be a criminal and become reformed as a result of transportation. This occurs chiefly about midway through the novel when Rex writes a letter supposedly to his father (though actually directed to his wife, Sarah,) and a confessional, both at the encouragement of incompetent Reverend Meekin. Meekin believes the letter demonstrates “true piety” and is a “most touching letter” (Clark 204). The confessional, likewise, is moving enough to be sent to Meekin’s Bishop (Clark 232). Even after Maurice Frere uncovers a secret message within the letter, Meekin is still not convinced, and later says as much to Reverend North: “Everybody seems to be against that fellow… He seems to me to be truly penitent for his offences—a misguided, but not a hypocritical man” (Clark 232). Meekin sends the letter to Sarah (helping to facilitate Rex’s escape) and the confessional to the Bishop because these documents fit within Meekin’s conception of repentance. After all, Rex has chosen one genre—the confessional—specifically because its exigence is one of repentance for wrong-doing and privileging truth.

Expanding this understanding of genre even further, Rex’s letter in particular contains ample references to Biblical scriptures (Clark 206-207). These scriptures belong to another genre itself, one that Rex works strategically into his letter. Doing so adds an additional level of
supposed piety, as if Rex's familiarity with scripture indicates that he is truly reformed. Further, he is able to build an association between his genre, the letter, and the genre of religious scripture, which carries associations with goodness, truth, and the Christian religion. Again, use of scriptures within the letter also indicates Rex's awareness of his audience. These Biblical references might not have carried as much weight if read by another authority figure, but, because they are read by Meekin, admittedly an ineffectual Reverend, though one who would view scriptures in a positive light, they add to the rhetorical persuasiveness of the letter.

An additional factor in the success of Rex’s writings lies in their collective presentation. Taken separately, these genres of the letter and the confessional might not have been as successful, but because they are presented to Meekin together, handed to him at the same time, their seeming truthiness and persuasion are increased. As such, Rex is able to mimic rehabilitation at the hands of the transportation system. Because this is what Meekin hopes for, and because it fits with the Empire’s outward motivations for employing transportation (even if the true purpose is to gain land, goods, wealth, and power), Rex succeeds. It could certainly be argued that Meekin is hardly difficult to deceive; after all, Frere is able to see through Rex’s letter. However, Meekin is the audience that Rex most wants to deceive, and he successfully does so. Further, the confessional manages to confuse and deceive even Sylvia (Clark 219).

As a final note on the rhetorical flexibility and genre awareness of John Rex, it is also important to consider the chain of events which follow Meekin's acceptance of the letter and confessional. After thinking he has sent the letter to Rex's father, Meekin receives a letter in response: “In a month Mr. Meekin received a letter, beautifully written, from ‘Sarah Rex’, stating briefly that she had heard of his goodness, that the enclosed letter was for her husband, and that if it was against the rules to give it to him, she begged it might be returned to her
unread” (Clark 270). Meekin obliges by giving the letter to Rex unopened, and the next day Rex shows Meekin Sarah's letter, one Meekin perceives as "a most touching pious production" (Clark 270). Meekin, however, does not realize that Sarah has likewise sent Rex a second letter within the same correspondence outlining their true plot. Rex then eats this letter to preserve its secrecy (Clark 270). Sarah's participation in Rex's scheme is of course vital, as she is Rex's contact outside of the prison who can secure Rex's eventual escape.

Though I focus most prominently here on Rex's use of genres, Sarah's utilization of them should not be underestimated. In the example above, Sarah manipulates Meekin by adding to the credibility of John Rex, sending him both a “pious” letter and a secret one (Clark 270). Though readers are not provided the full text of Sarah's letter as they are Rex's initial one, she undoubtedly makes use of the genre to accomplish the desired outcome of both herself and Rex. As with Rex's letter, Sarah's false one plays into the conception of Empire that aligns most with Meekin's—showing Rex as a repentant man with a pious woman back in England who loves him dearly. In this way, Sarah's use of genres adds to the effectiveness of his deception.4

In stark contrast to villain John Rex, protagonist Rufus Dawes is the man initially transported for robbery who spirals ever downward in status and believability throughout the course of the novel, all despite his innocence. Also unlike Rex, Dawes' use of public genres is largely unsuccessful. The prime example occurs after Dawes saves Frere, Sylvia, and Mrs. Vickers from the island. When Dawes is not released, he is lead to assume that Sylvia has died. Dawes begins to employ written genres in his defense, attempting to clear up whatever miscommunication has occurred. He writes letters to the government explaining the true events

4 Sarah’s rhetorical prowess is not confined to this particular example. Below I consider another instance where her understandings of genres and of Empire contribute to the success of Maurice Frere’s chosen genre.
that transpired, all of which are either never sent or never receive a response (Clark 186, 187). Later on, when attending the trial of the mutineers of the Osprey, Dawes sees that Sylvia is, in fact, alive. He speaks up, only to have the judge say: “This is not the place for an accusation against Captain Frere, nor the place to argue upon your alleged wrongs. If you have suffered injustice, the authorities will hear your complaint, and redress it” (Clark 187). Here, the judge assumes that Dawes fails to understand the official order of the court system. Of course, Dawes points out that he has made every attempt to make others aware of this “injustice”: “I have complained, your Honour. I wrote letter after letter to the Government, but they were never sent. Then I heard she was dead, and they sent me to the Coal Mines after that, and we never hear anything there” (Clarke 187).

Dawes continues his efforts in the following years, again writing both “letters” and “Statements” of his innocence (Clark 197). However, the authorities “grew weary of this perpetual iteration of what they believed to be malicious falsehoods, and ordered him heavier tasks and more continuous labor” (Clark 198). For Dawes, attempts at employing written public genres fails time and time again, so much so that his repeated attempts seem to solidify his guilt in the view of the authorities. Why? Dawes certainly makes concerted efforts at social action by uptaking his chosen genres, but they are met with failure, and I suggest that this is due to two reasons: The first is that his actions go against the rules and regulations of the system. As a convict, one found guilty of numerous secondary crimes and in no way passable as a gentlemen convict like the real-life convict writers mentioned above, Dawes is not permitted to write without permission, and his letters never seems to reach their intended audience. Second, the specific contents of his writings push against colonial power. Even if his letters and statements were forwarded on to the proper authorities, the notion that a man might be wrongfully
imprisoned for years suggests a massive failing of the convict transportation system. In the scope of Empire, truth (and truth within genres) only seems to matter when it upholds the status quo.

**Non-Convict Characters**

Having considered the ways in which the convict characters Dawes and Rex utilize public genres, I now consider other sorts of characters within the novel, specifically those who are not convicts. In particular, this analysis examines the public genres for social action employed by Reverend James North and Lieutenant Maurice Frere, though also considering Sarah Purfoy’s influence on the latter.

I first turn attention to Reverend James North, who Hughes describes as “Norfolk Island’s frail, morally tormented, alcoholic chaplain” (Hughes 544). Though he most often writes within the form of diary entries, these are never read by other characters, and so not within the scope of “public genres.” Instead, of most interest is North’s response to the flogging and death of Kirkland, the educated butler of Captain Burgess whose only secondary crime seems to be flinching at Burgess’s excessive swearing (Clark 227). North first threatens to report to the Governor when he hears that Kirkland might be flogged, saying “If Burgess flogs him I'll report it to the Governor [...] The condition of those dormitories is infamous” (Clark 234). Even during the flogging, North continues to threaten: “I'll report this to the Government [...] This is murderous” (Clark 236). Despite his objections, Kirkland is flogged to death, after which North writes a petition to the government asking for an investigation into Kirkland’s treatment (Clark 240). Many months later, he receives “an official letter” explaining that the “‘Comptroller-General of the Convict Department had descried that further inquiry concerning the death of the prisoner named in the margin was unnecessary’” (Clark 263). Like Dawes, North is truthful in the information he presents. North does not have the same issue of his letters failing to be sent
that North has, for as a Reverand, a non-convict, he at carries a bit more privilege in being permitted to write and distribute information via genres as he please. However, like Dawes, the truthfulness North wishes to convey does not align with the truthfulness the colonizer seems to wish to believe. That is, the petition suggests that the convict system is being abusive in power. As a result, this genre North uptakes to enact social action fails. In some ways, it is little wonder that North's alcoholism continues to worsen throughout the latter half of the novel, for he is shown time and time again that truth is inconsequential.

As a final example of a character uptaking public genres in order to enact some form of social action, I turn attention to Lieutenant (later Captain) Maurice Frere, in many ways the antagonist of His Natural Life, a cruel commander who seems to enjoy inflicting punishment on convicts and deceiver of his wife, Sylvia, whose lost memory does not recall that Rufus Dawes was the savior of the party trapped on the island. It is revealed about midway through the novel that Frere has had an ongoing affair with Sarah Purfoy, the wife of John Rex (Clark 169). When Rex and the other mutineers are re-captured, Sarah blackmails Frere to get him to testify in favor of Rex, threatening to tell Sylvia of Frere's infidelity if he does not comply (Clark 173). Frere eventually agrees, and the genre which he then uptakes to carry out his perjury is the court record. Frere states into the court record before a judge that Rex “might have left us to starve […] he might have murdered us; we were completely in his power [. . .] he showed great generosity for one in his situation” (Clark 187). This testimony by Frere is held as highly credible, particularly given Frere's known character as “such an uncompromising foe to all rebellious convicts” (Clark 188). If Frere is willing to testify in favor of Rex, it must be because Rex truly was merciful and generous. The end result is exactly what Sarah and Frere desire: Rex is sentenced to “transportation for life to the penal settlements of the colony” where Sarah can
know his whereabouts (Clark 188). Likewise, Sarah's satisfaction means that Frere need not worry about her divulging information about his mistresses to Sylvia. Both achieve what they wish to.

This is the only example genre I describe which is not actually written by the character uptaking it; rather, the court record is physically recorded by a third party. Nevertheless, Frere is able to make his statement believable because of both his ethos as an officer and his reputation as being harsh toward convicts. Further, this narrative constructed via the genre of the court record plays into the desired outcome of Empire, for Frere testifying in favor of Rex is what prevents him from being executed in England (Clark 188). Rex needing to be executed would suggest that the penal punishment he had thus far undergone in Tasmania was not working, that it was ineffectual. Instead, with Frere’s testimony, representatives of the English Empire are able to continue believing that transportation is a fitting, effective system of punishment. Although Frere is the character speaking falsehoods within the court record genre, thus the one uptaking it and bringing about social action, Sarah is perhaps ultimately responsible for his doing so. Again, though not a convict herself, she is able to manipulate public genres in favor of herself and the criminal she loves.

Concluding Thoughts and Consideration of Larger Genre Systems

An analysis of genres of Empire in His Natural Life would be incomplete without acknowledging that each of these example genres from the novel are not isolated, but are instead part of larger genre systems. Just as these characters—convict and non—write within genres to produce desired actions, all are also acted upon by other genres. Though he is ultimately the most successful of characters at manipulating genres for his own purposes, John Rex finds another public genre to be his downfall. After escaping from the colony and then from Sarah, Rex
assumes the identity of Richard Devine. Though this scheme succeeds for quite some time, it is eventually a public genre, an “illustrated journal,” that conveys his whereabouts to Sarah and enables her to take him back to Australia (Clark 351). For Rufus Dawes, his failure to convince the authorities of his innocence is inhibited likewise by other genres working against him. For instance, a novel is written about his and other convicts’ escapades, a biography is written about him, and an article appears in the *Gazette*, each of which reinforce an image of him as a delinquent, dangerous criminal (Clark 182). For North and his attempts at getting government officials to see the injustice of Kirkland’s murder, his work is undercut by a medical certificate, as well as “copies of the evidence of the constable and a letter from the Commandant,” all of which work to likewise discredit his claims of wrongdoing (Clark 244). Thus it not just about the genres characters write within; it is also about the genres others employ that either reinforce or circumvent their genres’ actions.

This analysis has detailed five characters and their uses of public genres as examples of successes and failures to navigate the genres of Empire in the form of convict John Rex’s use of letters and a confessional, innocent Rufus Dawes’ use of letters and “Statements,” spiritually-troubled Reverend James North’s use of a petition, and Captain Frere’s utilization of a court record at the direction of Sarah Purfoy. Further, this analysis has likewise briefly considered the other genres that work against or in favor of these character’s efforts. A rhetorical genre studies approach to considering the *His Natural Life* has demonstrated a clear pattern within the work in which truth is irrelevant in these public genres. Instead, their success is dependent on the degree to which they uphold the ideologies of Empire, when they prove that the transportation system is a righteous, effectual method of dealing with criminality and expanding and advancing the control of England abroad. Geography and terrain are not the only imprisoning forces to
consider, for when all genres within these larger genre systems are considered, the force of Empire is even more so at work, and the flexibility of genre as a construct enables such realizations.
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